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NEW, FLEXIBLE POLICIES HELP TEACHERS BECOME HIGHLY QUALIFIED

U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige today announced three new policies giving teachers greater flexibility in demonstrating that they are highly qualified under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) while also ensuring that every child in America is taught by a teacher who knows his or her subject.

These new policies, which take effect immediately, will address the particular challenges of teachers who teach more than one subject, especially those in rural districts and science teachers.

“We know that effective teachers are one of the most crucial factors in student achievement and are needed in every school in America, regardless of state line or city boundary,” Paige said. “That’s why No Child Left Behind puts such emphasis on giving every student in our great nation an expert teacher. We are committed to the goal of a world-class teaching force and recognize the real challenges states and educators face. The policies announced today offer common sense solutions that will help states and districts get the best teachers in front of the most needy students as soon as possible,” Paige said.

Last summer, the secretary announced the formation of the Teacher Assistance Corps (TAC), comprising 45 educators, leaders from higher education and national experts to better understand and support state efforts to implement the highly qualified teacher requirements of NCLB. TAC has visited 49 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, with the 50th state visit scheduled for next month. In addition to explaining the requirements of the law, offering

guidance and feedback on state efforts, and sharing information about promising practices from other states, the teams heard about unique situations, concerns and specific state challenges.

“We listened to educators from across the country, and we learned,” Paige said.

“First, we discovered that many states were not using the full flexibility in the law, especially to help their middle school and experienced teachers demonstrate that they are highly qualified. In addition, many were under the mistaken impression that all veteran teachers had to either go back to school or take a test.

“Today, we are responding with changes that make sense, supporting state efforts to strengthen teacher quality and aiding the professionals in the classroom, while also ensuring that the highest standards for qualified teachers—so imperative to student success—remain intact,” Paige added.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, highly qualified teachers must hold at least a bachelor’s degree, have full state certification or licensure, and have demonstrated competence in their subject areas. The law calls for all teachers of core academic subjects to be highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year. It also requires that all newly hired teachers in Title I schools or programs for economically disadvantaged students be highly qualified immediately.

One of the new flexibility provisions announced today recognizes that teachers in small, rural and isolated areas—about one-third of the nation’s school districts—are often assigned to teach multiple subjects, face unique challenges in meeting the highly qualified provisions in all subjects they teach, and may need additional time to meet the requirements in all subjects they teach. As long as teachers in eligible districts are highly qualified in at least one subject, they will have three more years to become highly qualified in the additional subjects they teach; newly hired teachers would have until their third year of teaching.

For science teachers, the Department's guidance will allow states the flexibility to use their own certification standards to determine subject-matter competency, rather than requiring it for each science subject. For example, if a state certifies teachers in the general field of science, a science teacher may demonstrate subject-matter competency through a "broad field" test or major. If a state requires certification or licensure in the specific science subjects, such as chemistry, biology or physics, the teacher would be required to demonstrate competency in each of the subjects.

The third flexible provision announced today assists current teachers who teach multiple subjects, particularly teachers in middle schools and those teaching students with special needs. Under the law, current teachers have the option—instead of taking a test or going back to school—to demonstrate subject-matter competency through a process called HOUSSE—high objective uniform state standard of evaluation. The HOUSSE may include a teacher's years of experience, high-quality professional development success as measured by a teacher's students' test scores, continuing education and other objective evaluations.

The change streamlines the HOUSSE process by allowing teachers to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge through one procedure for all the subjects they teach while maintaining the same high standard for subject-matter mastery.

Paige noted that more than \$5.1 billion in federal funds are available for teacher-related programs, with \$2.9 billion specifically geared to help states meet the highly qualified teacher requirements. These funds, under the Improving Teacher Quality State Grants (Title II of NCLB), may be used for teacher training, professional development, recruitment and retention activities.

He also explained that the Department has been thoroughly enforcing the law, imposing conditions on grant awards for 26 states that had missing or incomplete data on the percentage of classes taught by teachers who are highly qualified. Paige said the Department is prepared to delay the release of its July 1 funding until the conditions are satisfied. “To do what’s best for our nation’s children, we need data and knowledge about the qualifications of our classroom teachers, particularly those in high-poverty districts.”

The secretary said he will soon be unveiling additional efforts to support America’s teachers and the implementation of the highly qualified teacher provisions. These will include a new Web site—www.teacherquality.us—to share information about initiatives at the state and local levels, summer institutes for teachers to be held across the country, and a National Teacher Summit later this year.

“I applaud our nation’s teachers for their dedication to their profession and their commitment to helping all children learn. Their passion is my passion, and I look forward to continuing the partnership with educators and states to help all students excel academically,” Paige said.

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